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Some "Facts" About CIA; Why We Know No More

By David Barnett

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WASHINGTON, D. C. — Every time the Central Intelligence Agency gets caught riding the wrong way on a foreign road, some lawmakers start a futile clamor for putting a congressional halter on the agency.

Once again, legislation has been introduced to create a joint congressional committee of House and Senate members to supervise the activities of the secret agency.

Two years ago, the issue was the fiasco at the Bay of Pigs, in Castro's Cuba.

This time it's Viet Nam.

Says Senator Wayne Morse (Dem., Ore.):

"Congress has permitted CIA to continue to exercise what appears, in fact, to amount to a police power in a democracy. As a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, I cannot tell the Senate—nor can any other member of the committee—what the facts are about CIA policy in South Viet Nam or anywhere else in the world."

Backed Diem

Since 1954

There are some "facts" about this policy, however, that are accepted in congressional corridors.

The CIA has supported the rise to power of Ngo Dinh Diem, as the best anti-Communist available, since 1954.

The U. S. ambassador in Viet Nam at the time, Gen. J. Lawton Collins, recommended withdrawal of U. S. support.

chief CIA agent in the area, however, disagreed, and persuaded the then chief of the agency, Allen W. Dulles.

CIA Chief Dulles persuaded his brother, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, to back Diem.

The agency now pays some \$3 million a year to support

"special forces" of South Viet Nam.

The main trouble, says Representative William Fitz Ryan (Dem. N. Y.), is that "the CIA is consistently overstepping its role as an intelligence gathering agency by engaging in policy formulation and execution."

Committee
Already

Ryan tried two years ago to get a joint committee set up. As so often happens, the furor over the abortive Cuban affair subsided and so did criticism of the CIA.

The standard and, so far, persuasive argument by the elder statesmen of Congress against a joint committee is that there already is a group that secretly oversees the CIA. It is made up of subcommittees of the Armed Services and Appropriations committees.

Senator Eugene McCarthy (Dem., Minn.), an early advocate of a joint committee, says that supervision is hardly worth mentioning. He recalled that, 10 years ago, Senator Leverett Saltonstall (Rep., Mass.), a member of the secret CIA group, conceded publicly that members got only skimpy information from the CIA—perhaps once or twice a year.

As now set up, McCarthy said, the CIA only tells what it wants to tell to the lawmakers it wants to get the information.

"All of which means that there will be no real congressional supervision until it is required by law," he noted.

Can Congress be persuaded to pass such a law?

McCarthy is convinced it cannot, unless there is an administration in the White House that wants it to.



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